Leftists Still Want To Abolish the Family

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By Ryan McMaken August 12, 2025

Early last month, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)sponsored a panel on the family at the organization's Socialism Conference 2025. The organization described the topic this way: "How should the left relate to the family? Socialist analysis makes clear that the nuclear family form is an inherently repressive, racist, and hetero-sexist institution that functionally reinforces and reproduces capitalism."

The roundtable featured Olivia Katbi, the co chair of Portland DSA; Eman Abdelhadi, an assistant professor and sociologist at the University of Chicago; and Katie Gibson, a Teaching Fellow at the University of Chicago.

Key observations from the panelists included:

- "When we talk about family abolition, we're talking about the abolition of the economic unit… all of our material needs taken care of by the collective."
- "We argue for abolition of the family in general… the institution of the family acts as part of the carceral system."

Naturally, these leftists partly want to abolish the family because they agree with Marx that the family is a "bourgeois" institution that must be destroyed in order to clear the way for the socialist utopia. Another element of opposition to the family comes from the Left's bizarre preoccupation with commodifying sex. It is ironic that these "anti-capitalists" seek so vehemently to turn sex into an economic commodity, but this appears to be a key tenet of leftist thinking in recent decades. Thus, they seek to normalize sex work. This is partly because the Left views marriage as a type of sex work itself. After all, the family is "inherently repressive," and all sex within marriage is essentially rape. It is therefore "progress" to abolish marital sex and replace it with "sex work."

A couple of quotations from the roundtable that capture this attitude include:

- "Sex work and marriage can't exist without each other—they're two sides of the same coin."
- "The only real difference between marriage and prostitution is the price and the duration of the contract."

These leftists also believe that the rearing of children ought to be managed and controlled by the state. That is, the raising of children should be collectivized and the parent-child bond replaced with the child-collective relationship.

This idea is certainly familiar to Sophie Lewis, another presenter at the conference, who has written a book pushing for the widespread use of surrogacy in the birthing of children. Specifically, Lewis contends that surrogacy is a helpful tool in breaking the biological bond between parents and children, and destroying traditional notions of gender and family.

(Lewis is partly correct. Surrogacy does indeed undermine the family as an institution and widespread surrogacy will prove to be a key building block for the post-humanist dystopian nightmare that people like Elon Musk are trying to build.)

At the core of all of this is opposition to the family as an independent institution, and the leftist contention that the family must be placed totally under the control of the state.

Whatever the Left might have to say about the economic mechanisms supposedly underlying the family, the fact is the Left's hatred for the family mostly stems from the fact that the family is an obstacle to state power.

As I noted in this lecture last year, the family is an institution that predates all states and which is natural to the human condition and to all human societies.

Leftists such as those at the DSA conference seek to abolish any remaining vestiges of non-state independent governance. Although they deny it, "democratic socialists" are at the forefront of pushing for untrammeled state power, to be administered by an "enlightened" ruling oligarchy. The democratic socialists, therefore, seek to refocus all human loyalties toward the state, creating a direct state-citizen relationship for all, and setting up the state as the institution that meets *all* human needs. Unlike every particular family, which is relatively weak in its exercise of power, and is always temporary, the state's power, in the Left's vision, is to be overwhelming and permanent.

This idea of the family as an obstacle was central to advocates of state-building throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Marxists, being extreme advocates for state power, also saw the "problem" of the family. For example, as the Marxists saw things in nineteenth-century Europe, extended family enterprises made up a separate locus of power outside the state, and many of these families self-consciously sought to remain economically independent. Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm's view of the "bourgeois family" captures some of the central role of the family in nineteenth-century society: "The 'family' was not merely the basic social unit of bourgeois society but its basic unit of property and business enterprise."

But even this informal institutional competition with the state could not be tolerated by the advocates of greater state power. In the nineteenth century, the state's opposition to independent institutions was taken to the next level with the welfare state. This came first in Germany, where a true bureaucratic welfare state was introduced for the first time by conservative nationalist Otto von Bismarck. (Bismarck was a conservative, but he

implemented the welfare state-which was pushed by the socialists-as a means of co-opting the socialists, politically.) In any case, Bismarck, like the socialists, pushed the welfare state as a deliberate effort to end the population's financial independence from the state.

Economist Antony Mueller concludes the welfare state established "a system of mutual obligation between the State and its citizens." This also represented a powerful way of circumventing the family unit as an institutional buffer between the state and the individuals. Certainly, poverty relief had existed in the past. But, it nearly always was administered at a household level. The state, prior to Bismark's welfare state, had not yet fully pierced the household family unit to deal directly with individuals.

The same plan has been copied throughout the world, and has been enormously successful in the state's co-option of the family. Naturally, modern leftists want more of this. A lot more.

This has been key in building up state power, and the sidelining of the family is so important to the Left because resistance to the state has tended to be centered around some cultural or local institutional loyalty. Historically, this often took the form of local networks of families and their allies. Tocqueville noted that these groups provided a ready nexus around which to organize opposition to government abuses. He writes, Horne, Douglas Best Price: $13.36 Buy New $13.95 (as of 09:16 UTC - Details)

As long as family feeling was kept alive, the antagonist of oppression was never alone; he looked about him, and found his clients, his hereditary friends, and his kinsfolk. If this support was wanting, he was sustained by his ancestors and animated by his posterity.

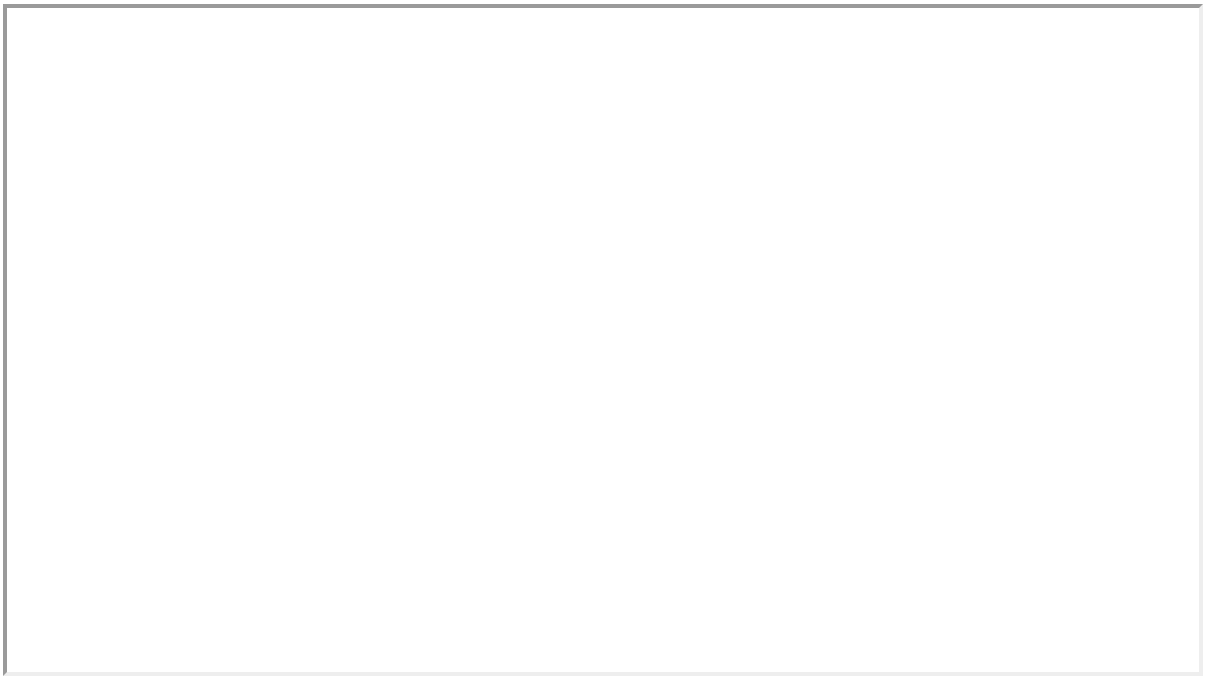
Without these, or similar institutions, Tocqueville concluded, political opposition to the state becomes ineffective. Specifically, without institutions through which to practically build resistance to state power, even anti-regime ideology has no way of being brought into practice:

He continues:

What strength can even public opinion have retained, when no twenty persons are connected by a common tie; when not a man, nor a family … has the power of representing that opinion; and when every citizen—being equally weak, equally poor, and equally dependant [*sic*]—has only his personal impotence to oppose to the organized force of the government?

The reduction of individuals to impotent, isolated units—who interact primarily with state agents—is the ultimate outcome of the Left's efforts, regardless of what its stated goals may be. Instead of independent family groups, bonded by biology and ancient, natural modes of human affection and loyalty, we are instead to have, as the "norm," state-regulated sex workers and state-apportioned children, conceived by IVF and grown in surrogate wombs.

This, the left tells us, will free us from the “slavery” of marriage and family, and replace capitalism with the “freedom” to be utterly alone, atomistic, and without social or economic bonds outside the state.



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